

“Finding Love ... Apart from Marriage” // Mark 3:31–35; Luke 18:28–30 // *Finding Love: How Does This Work? #4*

On Wednesday, I got back from Germany, where I and a few of our staff put on a church planting and multiplication seminar there in what is often said is the most secular place in the world, meaning that more people indicate they are atheists or have “no religion” than any other place in the world. Some of our people are there and they put on this conference, and we had 200 church planters and leaders ... It’s amazing what God is doing ... and then, on the way back, we stopped in London to visit with our church plant there ... What a week. It’s amazing to see how people who used to sit right here are being used in places like that around the world.

We are on week four of a relationship series, “Finding Love,” in which we’re looking at what some of the most ancient texts in the world say about finding love. And this week, I want you to open your Bibles to Mark 3 ... I had planned to do my final message in this series from Song of Solomon, exploring “3 Essentials for Lifelong Love,” but as we’ve gone through this series, I’ve felt the need to use MY last week differently. Maybe I’m off, but I’m trying to listen to the Spirit of God as best I can.

Works Consulted:

No Greater Love: A Biblical Vision of Friendship, Rebecca McLaughlin
 “Singleness: Myth Busting,” Lori Frances
Confronting Christianity, Rebecca McLaughlin
 “Singleness (Matthew 19:12),” Jon Tyson
Seven Myths About Singleness, Sam Allberry
 “Finding the One,” Craig Groeschel
 “Singleness,” David Platt

You see, I know there are some of you in here for whom what we’re talking about just doesn’t seem that relevant. I get that. I mean, maybe, for whatever reason, marriage just isn’t on the horizon for you right now, and maybe that’s your choice or maybe it’s not. Or maybe you are interested in marriage but you’re an older single, or widowed, and the way we’ve approached this topic just doesn’t seem to fit where you are. It’s not scratching where you itch.

By the way—I hope you won’t take this as defensive—but we knew that going in. We’re a big church, and the approach we were going to take wouldn’t apply equally to everyone. But listen—the church is a family—and that means certain messages will be more applicable to some family members than they are to others, and we put up with some themes or message series for the sake of the family, even if they aren’t the most applicable thing for us. Amen? Married people, if you’re sitting with your spouse, look at each other and say, “It ain’t all about us.” Single people, if you’re sitting with a friend, look at them and say, “And it ain’t all about us either.” And kids, you guys can say, “That’s right, old people. It’s always about us.” Just kidding.

All that said, I did want to take a moment and step back to address this question from the perspective of those of you for whom marriage, or a good marriage, isn’t a reality or anywhere on the immediate horizon.

Let’s do a quick little poll:

- **How many of you are married?** Raise your hand up at your campus—you’re not raising it for me, you’re raising it for everyone else, so raise it up....

- **OK, now ... How many of you are not married?** Raise those up high too. Come on, up, up!
- **Anybody** in here who has gotten **married within the last year? How about during this series?**
- **How many of you are single and would really be open to meeting "THE ONE" sometime soon?** Come on, raise those hands up high. I'll give you a minute to see who else's hands are raised. *Just kidding!*
- **How about this one: How many of you met and married THE ONE that you thought was THE ONE, but now after a few years, you'd like to trade in THAT ONE for ANOTHER ONE?** Raise ... Just kidding! **DO NOT raise your hand. Do not!** *God bless you, I see that hand. Yes, I see that hand. I'll pray for you.*

Did you know: This generation will remain single longer than any other generation in American history.

- The **average age** for an American male getting married now for the first time is almost 31; for women it's 28.
- We have close to **7K single people** at our church services each weekend.

And I'll acknowledge, **sometimes being single in a church** can be tough.

- My family and I have had various singles live with us over the years; one told me it felt like a lot of people were always subtly pressuring her to get married, and that if she wasn't getting married, there seemed to be some underlying assumption that something had gone wrong.
- She said married people would say things to her like, *"Don't worry ... YOU'LL get married someday."* **As if to say,** "Buck up, poor one, you won't have to be in this inferior stage forever."
- One of our **former elders was single in this church** for a long time, and he said sometimes when he was at a wedding, these sweet little old ladies ... I told him he had a hateful spirit and needed prayer.

- *Sometimes, this single girl who lived with us said she'd hear people say, as if trying to console her, "Well, **God just has to do a little bit of work on you before he brings you that special someone.**" And she'd think, "Does that mean something is wrong in me that God has to fix before I can get married?" And that's not to mention, she said, looking around at other people in the church, some of the most dysfunctional people she'd ever seen in her life were married." I mean, if God gave marriage as a reward for readiness, then sometimes, it seems like he got the wrong address. Amen?*

The title of our series is "Finding Love," and I want to talk about finding lasting love when you're not married. **(And, by the way, married people: what I'm going to show us today has profound implications** for how you think about your marriage, so pay attention.)

It starts with challenging what might be the most cherished myth in our culture, a deeply, deeply ingrained myth; one often perpetuated by the church: I call it **the "Marriage = Completion" Myth.**

- **This myth holds the idea that marriage (and having a close-knit biological family) is some kind of ultimate state for us, the pinnacle of earthly blessing.**
- *And thus, if you don't find that special someone to marry, you will have missed out on THE essential part of a full and happy life.*

I want to start by showing how Jesus utterly refuted the myth that Marriage = Completion in several places, the first of which is Mark 3.

OK, here we go: **Mark 3:31–35:** **And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they ... called him. [32] And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you."** Imagine this happened somewhere today. A pastor is up somewhere preaching and somebody comes to them and says, "Your mother and brothers need you." We'd expect that pastor to say, *"Oh well, family first; family is*

my first calling, you know; see you guys later.” In fact, we’d almost be scandalized if he *didn’t* say that, right? Look at how Jesus responds:

[33] And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?”
 [34] And (then) looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! [35] For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.” (Again, imagine if I did that! “Your family needs you, J.D.” And I said, “Who is my wife and family? You all, listening to the Word of God right now, you are my family.”)

- o **Question:** Was Jesus dissing family? **No: He was using hyperbole, exaggeration,** to teach something very important. Jesus did that often: “It’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter heaven.” “If your hand is prone to sin, cut it off.”
- o **Here’s what he was trying to teach:** (to quote our friend Rebecca McLaughlin) “He’s teaching us that our **FIRST** (and primary, ultimate) **identity as followers of Jesus is not biological; it’s theological.**”

Give me a minute to build this out for you. (And I’m going to use several places Jesus spoke to this. I’ll put them **all up here on the screen** for you.)

First, let’s be clear: Jesus did not diss the importance of family or our commitment to it.

- In fact, Jesus had such a high view of the commitment levels involved in marriage and family that it sometimes shocked his disciples.
- For example, **Jews in Jesus’ day had a whole list of reasons that divorce might be ok** but Jesus said in Matthew 19 that getting divorced for any reason except marital unfaithfulness was, in God’s eyes, like committing adultery. In 1 Corinthians, Paul would expand that list to include a couple of other things, but the point

is that Jesus and Paul had a higher view of the commitment levels involved in marriage than anyone else at the time.

- **Similarly, Jesus put an incredibly high value on the responsibility of parents to care for their children,** far beyond people of his generation. In the first-century world, children were thought of as secondary—the needs of adults were far more important than those of the kids. **So Jesus, in Luke 18,** scandalized everyone by gathering everybody’s kids to himself, and telling the adults that their needs could wait because the kingdom of God consisted of people like these kids. **In Luke 17,** he said that if someone didn’t do right by their kid, it would be better for them that a millstone (think a one-ton rock) be hung around their neck and thrown into the sea than have to face God’s judgment for neglecting your kids. **Paul, in 1 Timothy,** said that if a man didn’t properly care for his family, he was worse than an infidel, and he makes being a good dad one of his requirements for being a church leader.

The point is—no one talks about the importance of commitment to earthly family more than Jesus did.

- **In Mark 7, Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites** for using “religious obligations” as an excuse for not providing for their parents.
- **In every situation, he raised the commitment levels expected in biological families.**

And yet, Jesus consistently prioritized spiritual family over biological. **He even said:** “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, **yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple**” (Luke 14:26). “Hate?” Jesus said we can’t be his follower unless we *hate* our **father** and **mother** and **wife** and **children**? Wouldn’t that go against everything else Jesus taught? *His point, obviously, is not that we should actually hate our parents or our spouses or our kids; he’s saying that compared to the value we place on him and our spiritual family, our commitment to our biological family should seem like hate.*

Listen, what I'm about to say is **RADICAL**. You ready? **The nuclear family is not the center of God's kingdom.** *Now—don't miss what I am saying: The family unit is the building block of our society (and it should be, by the way—God ordered it that way), but it is not the center of Jesus' kingdom.* Jesus did not diss the importance of the nuclear family—he just said it's **not ultimate**, not the most important family connection we have in the kingdom of God.)

Two more places I want to show you where Jesus teaches this and then we'll draw some conclusions: **Luke 11:27** As Jesus was saying these things (as he was teaching some great truth), a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!" (Y'all, I'm **all into people talking back to me** while I preach; I love it when someone says, "Preach it, preacher," and so forth—but **this has to be one of the weirdest** things ever said to someone while they were preaching: Blessed are the breasts at which you nursed!) Jesus turned and said "Weird." No, he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

- Basically, somebody said, "Jesus, how great it must be to be **related** to you!" And Jesus said, "**Nope. Those who obey the word of God are more blessed to me than even my own biological mother!**"
- **Think about it: How awesome would it be to have Jesus in your ancestry tree? If that were true, I'd be working that into any conversation I could.** "Oh, you were related to some of the Pilgrims on the Mayflower? Well, my great-great-uncle was Jesus." I mean, anyone who knows me at all knows that if you give me half a chance, I'll tell you that my great, great, great, great, great uncle was **Davy Crockett**. If you bring up Tennessee, Texas, or the nineteenth century in general, I'll find a way to slip that into conversation.
- **But how cool would it be to be blood-related to Jesus? And yet Jesus says, "Being my brother? My mom? Not that big of a deal.** Being in my family and having my Spirit dwell in you? **Huge deal.**"

Christopher Yuan—a Christian author I really respect, and has himself been single for years, says: "Our earthly families are **temporarily** bound by blood, but the family of God is **eternally** bound by the blood of the lamb."

OK, one more: Mark 12:18—For many people, this is a **confusing**, and often **mystifying**, and even initially **depressing** passage: **And the Sadducees, who say that there is no resurrection, asked him a question, [19] "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. [20] There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring. [21] And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. [22] And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died. [23] In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife." I know, this sounds like the prologue to a Mormon joke... [24] Jesus said to them, "You are wrong, knowing neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. [25] For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.**

- Jesus' answer, simply: **In heaven, marriage and biological family do not exist.**
- As I showed you the first week of this series, marriage was **God's first solution** for dealing with our loneliness. But it wasn't his only plan, or even his **ultimate** one.
- **In heaven, in our ultimate, glorified, resurrected** state, we won't have **lost our need for companionship**; just that up there, **God will deal with** our "aloneness" in a better way.
- **No one is married** up there, and **whomever** we're married to down here, we **won't be married to** up there.
- **I'll admit: Part of me finds this a little sad. In heaven, when I see Veronica, there's not going to be anything? Will I at least give her a wink and a suggestive nod, maybe?**

- You say, “Well, this **makes me sad, too!**” And yet there’s **no sadness, of course, in heaven**, and that’s because in heaven, you see, our joys are not diminished at all; they are heightened. Transformed. Matured.
- **C.S. Lewis**, in his book *Miracles*, had a great analogy for this: **A toddler, he says, thinks the single greatest thing in life is to eat candy**. Imagine you are an elderly grandmother trying to explain to your **toddler granddaughter** some of the things you’ve most loved about life: The joy of friendship and falling in love; the joy of staring out over the grandeur of the Grand Canyon. And your toddler granddaughter says, “Yeah, but can you eat Skittles while you do these things?”
 - **You have a hard time explaining that these pleasures are so much better** that when you’re wrapped up in them, you won’t even think about Skittles.
 - **Lewis said that we, like that child, lack the ability to understand the joys of eternity.** We know now the **pleasures of earthly things** like sex, married life, and nuclear family; “**We do not know, except in glimpses, the other thing which, in Heaven, will leave no room for them.**”¹
 - **So whatever God has for us there** will be even better than what we have here. And that means however things go down up there (and I don’t know much about it, and I don’t think anybody else does either), what I’m sure of is that I’ll be even closer to my wife and kids there than I am here.² Which **makes me less sad.**

John Piper, talking about Jesus’ shocking words in Mark 3, said: **Jesus called out a new family where single people in Christ are full-fledged family members on a par with all others, bearing fruit for God and**

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*

² “Heaven will be the best of both worlds. We’ll have the single person’s ability to focus 100 percent of all of our resources on God AND we, the church, will have all of the goodness of THE greatest marriage in the world as we, the bride of Christ, will finally be with our groom forever. Heaven is both, the best of the gift of singleness AND the best of the gift of marriage so put your hope there.” Christopher Yuan

becoming mothers and fathers of the eternal kind. Marriage is temporary; and it will finally give way to the relationship to which it was pointing all along: Christ and the church—the way a picture is no longer needed when you see face to face.”³ **(When I travel, I carry around a picture of my family;** I look at it when I miss them. But when I’m home, I put up the picture, because I have the reality. Marriage was just a picture, a distorted, blurry, fading picture of the love of Jesus—he’s the intimacy and tenderness and unconditional love your soul craves.)

You say, “**But Pastor, that’s sweet and spiritual, but I don’t want to be alone at Christmases, and I don’t want to grow older alone and have no one to take care of me.**” ***That’s what I am trying to say.*** You’re **not supposed to be alone.** *It’s just that marriage is not the only way God takes care of that.*

Jesus had said in Luke: “*Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, AND in the age to come eternal life*” (Luke 18:28–30). **Not just in eternity; NOW.**

- Y’all listen: In the book of Acts, the early church faces every sort of hardship a person could face—poverty, famine, getting stoned, being shipwrecked, being falsely accused, persecution. But the one thing they don’t seem to have to deal with is loneliness. I can’t find a single place in Acts where someone was lonely.
- **You should develop the kinds of relationships in the church** that you spend Christmas with. The kind that will take care of you as you get older.

HERE’S THE POINT: Singleness is not a second-class, inferior state in God’s kingdom.

- **Think about it:** Jesus was the most happy, fulfilled, fully alive person ever to walk the face of the earth and he was single.

³ John Piper, “[Single in Christ: A Name Better than Sons and Daughters.](#)” DesiringGod.org

- **At no point in the Gospels do we see even a *hint*** that Jesus' singleness was a source of dissatisfaction for him.
- His singleness certainly didn't mean he didn't fully know the **experience of love**. Right? Just before he died, he told his disciples: "**Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends**" (John 15:13). He knew and experienced the GREATEST. LOVE. AVAILABLE.

You say, "Ah, but J.D., I really want to have kids." Let me respond to that with words from a letter I got from one of our single missionaries who had just come off the field where she'd served for almost 10 years. She said:

(For the first few years on the mission field, I grieved the "loss" of being able to have biological children, but God used that) "by grace and through tears, to make me the proudest and most joy-filled (spiritual) mom on the planet the day I saw my spiritual son baptized in the unreached corners of East Asia.

I don't know what it's like to hold my own newborn baby for the first time. I'd imagine it feels like your heart's about to burst. I imagine that because that's how I felt as this young man came up from the baptismal waters.

The doctrine of spiritual children has by far been the most inspiring, joy-giving, biblical doctrine ... maybe of my whole life.

And another perk ... I only had to wait six months for a spiritual grandbaby."

As amazing as biological offspring is, Jesus prioritized spiritual offspring even more. It's **OK to mourn the lack of ability** to have biological kids ... It's a real loss. But by grace, even that real grief can be overshadowed by the real joy of having eternal spiritual children.

The only part of your life that will be truly unfulfilled if you are single is sexual. And that's a legitimate earthly loss, and I don't want to minimize that.

- But God says **he will give you a special *charisma*** (a spiritual empowerment) for that, too.
- **God can enable you to live a happy and fulfilled life without sex. Remember**, the most joy-filled, love-filled Man ever to walk the face of the earth lived without sex.
- **But the other things** marriage supplies—companionship and offspring—God gives you now, in an ultimate form, in eternal form, through the **church**.
- **Rebecca McLaughlin**, again: ***You won't wither without sex; you will wither without friend and family connection.***⁴

So, what does all that mean? Three things. They should be obvious:

1. Don't make an idol out of earthly family

Reject the "marriage = completion" myth. It's a lie. And I'm not just talking to single people when I say that either. For a lot of you married people, the reason you have so many marriage problems is that you founded your marriage on this myth and you both live by it. Throughout your whole marriage, you've been looking for marriage to give you something it wasn't designed to give!

Gary Thomas, a marriage counselor, says: "**Marriage doesn't solve emptiness; it exposes it.**" Problems like loneliness and insecurity aren't solved by a relationship with another human; they are solved by a relationship with God.

It's why I said our first week that **you're not ready to date until you're ready not to date**. Because until you're ready not to date, you're going to try to use that marriage partner for something they weren't

⁴ *Confronting Christianity*

designed to give. That marriage partner will never meet your deepest soul needs. They can't supply the love that you crave, that complete acceptance where someone knows you completely and loves you anyway. That hole is a God-shaped hole, not a "missing lover" shaped hole.

Find your identity, security, and happiness in Christ FIRST. And when you do that, marriage and singleness will begin to take on a different weight in your life.

- You might still want to be married. I'm not spiritualizing that or saying you won't care. What I am saying is that if God withholds good marriage from you for some reason, he will give you Spirit-empowerment to endure that well. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul calls both marriage and singleness spiritual gifts, which means we need Spirit-empowerment to do either one well!
- (One of my single friends said that singleness can be like a fast—you go without something that you want for a while, like food, and during those times of desire, you learn that God can sustain you even without that thing.) And you don't have to ever give up asking for marriage, by the way. I'm just saying you won't need it to be a complete person.

So, I urge you, Summit: Reject the **marriage = completion myth**. And that's a lot easier said than done, by the way, because that myth is so ingrained EVERYWHERE in our culture. It's the theme of our favorite movies; it saturates the lyrics of our favorite songs.

- *"I don't wanna think of anything else now that I thought of you. I've been sleeping so long in a 20-year dark-night; AND now I see daylight, I only see daylight."*⁵ And I'm not picking on Taylor Swift, all you Swifties, I'm not picking on you. ALL the songs we love say that.

⁵ Thanks to Kyndall Winecoff, a college student at our Blue Ridge campus, for tracking this example down for us—and quickly, too!

- **But you gotta reject it.** Jesus is the daylight you're looking for. Only he can lead you out of your 20-year, or 40-year, or eternity of darkness.
- **Here's a story I've never told you.** *When Veronica and I got married, we were trying to figure out what song to use for our first dance, and we both loved (DON'T JUDGE) "There's No Way" by Alabama. It's an old country song. But I just couldn't bring myself to make that our first dance, and maybe I took myself too seriously back then, but I knew the chorus was patently untrue: "There's no way I could make it without you; there's no way that I'd even try; if I had to survive without you in my life, I know I wouldn't last a day; oh, baby, there's no way." It's a sweet song, and I'll be honest, I didn't want to live any more days in my life without Veronica, and don't want to imagine any version of life anymore without her, but ultimately the words of that song are not true for us. As hard as it would be, I could make it without her, and she could make it without me. And that's because Jesus is our Savior, our daylight, our completion; and he's a Savior who promised he'd never leave us or forsake us, and one who proved that not even the grave could take away his presence from us. And it's true: I don't want to live without Veronica, but Jesus is MY life. And Jesus is hers too. So, we opted not to go with that song. *Instead, we chose "Get Jiggy with It."* Just kidding.*

2. Treat your church as family

When I say "the church is family," most of us think in terms of a weak metaphor, meaning we have some sentimental attachment to this church and feel about it like we do, say, our *alma mater*.

But for Jesus, saying "the church is family" was not some kind of weak metaphor. He thought of his body, the church, as his *actual* family and said that his commitment to this family was of the highest order imaginable. He'd give his life for him. And, as we saw, he consistently pointed to a day when marriage and biological relations would be no

more, and all that would remain would be the church. **We're not there yet**, but that reality should shape how we interact with each other in the church now.

I heard a story from one newer Christian lady who said that one Sunday her husband collapsed suddenly at church, and he ended up having to spend a week in the ICU. She said people from her small group volunteered to keep her kids; one offered to take off work to do so; one even referred to her kids as “our kids”—not in some creepy kind of way—just making the point that these were burdens this lady would never again have to carry alone.

Y'all, I hear versions of that story over and over in our church. I can't tell you how many times I reach out to somebody here who is going through something and they say, “Pastor, it's been a hard time, but the church has been awesome.” And by that they don't mean me or the staff. They mean “you,” the members. They'll say, “My small group has been here round the clock and made sure all of our needs are met.” Sometimes, y'all, it brings tears to my eyes.

The church *IS* family, **and that means you should invest in it as family**. Don't treat this like some kind of religious weekend pep talk where I'm your motivational speaker. If that's how you treat this church, and it's how a lot of you do, then you're only experiencing a fraction of the blessing Jesus intended the church to be. You say, “What are you telling us to do?”

- **Be in a small group; volunteer:** By the way, they say that for new people, unless you have seven personal relationships in a church your first year, you likely won't be there the second year.
- **Parents, get your kids KNOWN here!** I saw a study that showed that the single greatest predictor of whether your kid will continue on in the Lord after he goes to college is if he has five meaningful relationships in the church with other adults who are not you. And at our church, we've put all the coolest adults in the student ministry already. Just go check it out. You'll see what I'm talking about.

- **Invest in others outside of your family: Whether you're married or not**, invest in the kids of this church. Be the spiritual aunts and uncles to the kids in your small group. **Men, get involved in the men's ministry** or volunteer in the student ministry where you can speak wisdom into the lives of younger men who are growing up without a father. **Ladies, do the same for the women's ministry**. Part of how God fulfills his promise to be a father to the fatherless and a mother to the motherless is by providing those relationships in the church.
- **Here's another: Don't rush in and out of here so fast** like you're trying to beat the traffic out of a football game that your team has clearly lost. It's like every week, as soon as I'm done, some of you act like it's the fourth quarter in the UNC/JMU game and you're down by 25 and there's no way you can come back, so you might as well go ahead and leave and beat the traffic. Y'all, listen, Jesus has already won, so stick around for the full celebration.
 - I always challenge our staff to do their best to be available for the first seven minutes before and after church, because that's where we can help this church feel less like production and more like family.
- **Rebecca McLaughlin wrote a blog in 2018 called “Why I Don't Sit with My Husband (and sometimes my kids) in Church.”**⁶ It was a great article, but she said that some of the response she got to it was as if she had suggested stomping on puppies in Sunday School: “How dare you undermine the family in church?” they said. **But, she said, she also got a ton of messages** from single Christians who explained how much pain they feel in church when they sit alone. (And sure, sometimes people want to be alone at church—there can be a season for that; but in general, she says, **“We come to be together, not to have our private moment with the Lord.”** She offers three rules: **#1: An alone person in our gatherings is an emergency. #2: Friends can wait. #3: Introduce a**

⁶ In Christianity Today, April 19, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/april-web-only/why-i-dont-sit-with-my-husband-at-church.html>.

newcomer to someone else. (Listen, I'm just charismatic enough to believe that if you notice a new person at church by themselves, the Holy Spirit wants you to notice them and go to talk with them. So don't be disobedient. Be looking around for people at the beginning and end of service.)

- **Your friends can wait.** Meet them at Chipotle later. At church, find those people who look alone and introduce yourself to them, and then introduce them to someone else. This is our spiritual family.
- **Summit Family: What if we reserved the seven minutes right before and the seven minutes right after church just to do *this*?** I know, to be in here seven minutes early means that some of you are gonna have to leave your house 30 minutes earlier. But wouldn't that one thing be a great way of saying "Hey! You're not invisible to Jesus! He sees you, AND WE see you!" Wouldn't it be great to be part of a church like that?

One more thing on this, before I go to point 3: Treating the church like family means committing to the church like family.

- When you have a family member that is annoying, you don't just kick them out. You may want to, but you know, for family, the rules are different. Sometimes you roll your eyes and say, "Well, that's Uncle Billy."
- I'm not talking about ever tolerating sin or racism, just that in church, you're going to encounter people who rub you the wrong way. Sometimes, they love the music that you hate. Sometimes, they express political perspectives that drive you crazy. Sometimes, when you sit next to them in church, they sing off-key. **Anybody in here sit next to someone who sang off-key this morning?** (Just kidding, don't raise your hand.) Sometimes, they smell weird. But if we're family, you can't just say, "Well, you are not my favorite relationship, so I'm out." We're not consumers, we're family, and that means bearing with people when they are not our favorite people. It also means confronting them lovingly

when they are doing or believing something harmful and not just going somewhere else.⁷

OK, last one... **3. Prioritize expanding God's family**

- Not every person in here will have "biological" or "earthly" family, but we all can have spiritual family.
- And as important as investing in your biological family is (and let me be clear, again: Jesus said it was very important), your earthly family is not the only family you should invest in; it shouldn't really even be the primary one you invest in.
- If you're single, maybe you don't have biological offspring. But do you have sons and daughters in the faith? That's what Jesus said, and he loved them as much as anyone has ever loved their biological kids.
- Let me apply this one other direction: Sometimes, I hear older people talk as if the only thing they plan to do when they retire is invest in their grandkids, hang around their grandkids, as if biological family is everything; it's the victory lap.
- And, again, let me be clear—investing in your grandkids is a great ministry. It should be where you start. I hope you grandparents are very intentional with your grandkids, taking them out on special trips and out to special dinners and discipling them.
- But if you're a follower of Jesus, even more fundamental than investing in your earthly family is investing in that eternal one.
- **Don't make your earthly family an idol.** "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Jesus said. "All those God is bringing into his kingdom." So as you invest in your grandkids, don't lose the centrality, and the primacy, of the kingdom of God. (Hey, *newsflash*: They probably don't want you around that much anyway. They have enough to deal with without feeling like they have to always take care of you.)

⁷ Inspired by McLaughlin, *No Greater Love*, p. 45.

1. Don't make an idol out of earthly family. 2. Treat your church as family. 3. Prioritize expanding God's family.

"Finding Love." Jesus came to give us life, and life more abundantly." Finding and showing love is the essence of the Christian life, because God is love, the Apostle John said, and the ones who know God are the ones who love like he loves.

Jesus called you to family. He called you to love.

Two questions: Have you ever just received his love? It's literally there waiting for you, as a gift. Jesus saw all your sin and shame and came to earth to die to forgive you of it and make you new. But you have to receive it. Have you ever done that? You can *right now*...

Question 2: *Are you ready to commit to doing this God's way?* To say, "God, I trust you." Psalm 84:11 says, "No good thing will he withhold from those whose hearts are steadfast toward him," which means if you're single, he's not withholding anything good from you. Can you say, "Jesus, teach me how to love and be family like you were. I trust you"?